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AUTHOR Katz, Rima; Ralston, Martha
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ABSTRACT

In providing listening instruction in English as a Second Language, it is important to know the learner's listening needs and to match them to instruction as closely as possible. Important needs to consider are survival, tourism, social interaction, academic, business, vocational, and pleasure. Also of critical importance is the knowledge of the developmental stages through which students pass when learning to comprehend native speakers of English, including: stream of sound; isolated word recognition; phrase/formula recognition; clause/sentence recognition; and extended speech recognition. The types of listening tasks useful in developing student abilities at each of these stages must be analyzed, and the target skills needed to function in English should be identified. It is the acquisition of the 50+ micro-skills needed by a fluent listener that should be the goal when instructing students. Many teaching strategies have arisen from this theoretical background to aid the learner in the acquisition of target skills. Teachers can use several common task types, including matching/distinguishing, transferring, transcribing, scanning, extending, condensing, answering questions, and predicting. Previously prepared and teacher-prepared print, music, and video materials can be used and adapted for different skills and levels, and listening instruction can be integrated with development of other language skills. (MSE)

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From the Classroom to the Real World: Listening Attack Strategies

by Rima Katz and Martha Ralston

In recent years, ESL programs have realized the need to put more emphasis on receptive skills like listening, even though these skills are more difficult to evaluate than productive skills like speaking or writing. This presentation begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework which has evolved in the teaching of listening over the last fifteen years, and progresses to a development of various strategies, both audio and video, which have been successful with adult learners in the ESL classroom. In all the strategies presented, the main factor taken into account has been the relevance of the material to the students' listening experiences outside the classroom.

When we consider instruction in listening, we must first know the learners' listening needs. Instruction in listening skill development needs to match student needs as closely as possible. (Richards 1983) Listening purposes vary according to the situations the listener will encounter and the tasks in which s/he will be involved. Important ones to consider are survival (i.e., being able to function immediately in a new English-speaking environment and focus on listening first), tourism, social interaction (e.g., conversational listening, listening for information, academic listening (e.g., lectures), business activities, vocational purposes, and listening for pleasure (e.g., radio, television).

We must also be aware of linguistic factors in the preparation of listening exercises. Factors which affect how meaning is understood and influence how listeners process speech are: (1) reduced forms, (2) ungrammatical forms, (3) rhythm and stress, (4) noise, (5) speech rate, (6) pausing and speech error, (7) informal spoken English, (8) variations in English, (9) cohesive devices, (10) clausal basis of speech, (11) interactive conversation, and (12) information content. (Richards 1983, Nakamura 1984)

Also of critical importance is a knowledge of the developmental stages through which students pass when learning to comprehend native speakers of English. Taylor (1981) notes five distinct stages and characterizes them in the following way:

Stage One: Stream of sound (zero comprehension of content)
Stage Two: Isolated word recognition within the stream (minimal comprehension of general content)
Stage Three: Phrase/formula recognition (marginal comprehension of what is heard)
Stage Four: Clause/sentence recognition (minimally functional comprehension of content)
Stage Five: Extended speech recognition (general comprehension of unedited speech

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We must analyze the types of listening tasks which will be useful in developing the students' listening abilities at each of these stages. Taylor suggests that the learner may be at one stage in comprehending certain kinds of subject matter but at a different stage for other kinds. Someone may be at Stage 4 or 5 in supermarket shopping but at Stage 3 in American culture discussions and as low as Stage 2 in listening to the fast speech of normal conversations and TV situation comedies. He states that if advanced students are forced to move on to a new subject every day or so, they may have to start back at Stage 3 for each new topic and therefore lose confidence in their overall listening ability. If students are given extensive listening practice on the same topic before being switched to another topic, vocabulary comprehension can be improved quite quickly through context clues. It is at this stage that many listening programs do just the opposite; rather than exposing the students to extensive listening material on a continuing topic, which includes only some unfamiliar vocabulary, the tendency is often to give the student a highly varied diet of topics, each with its own immense brand-new set of crucial vocabulary. We have found that Taylor's criticism of listening programs at the fourth stage is often valid, with too many diverse topics covered. Students get the idea of the general content of the passage from the vocabulary preview. Pre-teaching the vocabulary item by item, before the student ever hears the complete passage, enables the student to have a good idea of the general content of the passage just from having pre-studied the vocabulary which is often listed in the order in which it first appears in the passage. We have attempted to follow Taylor's suggestion of offering sizable segments of passages before the vocabulary lists are provided. One can simply introduce the general topic, state the title, and/or give a setting. The aim is to see how much information the students can pick up in spite of the heavy vocabulary load, to help the students gain confidence in their ability to understand unfamiliar material of fairly complex subjects and yet be able to grasp the general content of what is being said.

After the needs of the learner have been decided and the listening stages determined, it is important to know the target skills a learner needs to function in English. Richards' (1983) detailed list of 50+ micro-skills that a fluent listener needs to function effectively both in academic and conversational listening has proven most helpful in providing a focus for preparation of activities. It is the acquisition of these receptive skills, more difficult to evaluate than the productive skills, which should become our goal when instructing students.

From this theoretical background have come many teaching strategies to aid the learners in their acquisition of the target skills. There are several common task types which teachers can employ, such as matching/distinguishing, transferring, transcribing, scanning, extending, condensing, answering questions, and predicting. (Richards 1983) Certain professional materials can be quite helpful in attaining our goals. Exercises

can be used from texts such as Basics in Listening (Lateral Press), Hearsay (Addison-Wesley Press), Speak Up (Newbury House Publishers), Listening Tasks (Cambridge University Press), and Listen for It (Oxford University Press), to name a few. For example, Lesson 26 in Speak Up presents a recording of a weather report which students listen to while referring to a map in their text. For more practice in authentic listening, the instructor can tape the day's weather using a cassette recorder and play it for the students on the same day. Also, students can listen at home and write down what they can learn about the weather forecast by listening for weather-related vocabulary words, e.g., highs, lows, humid, windy, rainy, snow, considerable cloudiness, showers, etc., which recur often in routine weather reports. (This is a Stage 2 activity.) We have done this with high beginning level students who have enjoyed the activity and developed confidence from seeing how much they can understand from an authentic broadcast. This can also be done with the radio and TV news. For this activity, intermediate students can be asked to analyze where they found the most difficulty, so the teacher can use this information when preparing future lessons. (See Appendix A.) Students can also learn how to respond to one of society's latest gadgets, the answering machine, through a series of classroom and home assignments to practice listening in the real world. (See Appendix B.)

We have used music to provide motivation while developing listening skills. We introduced folk and contemporary songs, some utilizing cloze exercises, with a suggestion that they be used along with a tape to provide authentic listening. Some student favorites are Billy Joel's "Movin' Out," and more recent "We Didn't Start the Fire," Paul Simon's "Sounds of Silence," John Denver's "Leavin' on a Jet Plane," Whitney Houston's "All at Once," and Bette Midler's Grammy Award-winning "Wind Beneath My Wings."

As the use of video materials has grown, we have incorporated them into our ESL classrooms. Susan Stempleski, in the presentation with Barry Tomalin and Paul Arcario at the San Antonio '89 TESOL Convention, mentioned several criteria for selecting ELT videos. These are density of language, sequence length, visual presentation, and speech and sound delivery. Here are her four rules for using video in language teaching: 1. Use short segments. 2. Allow for repeated viewing. 3. Encourage active viewing. 4. Present activities BEFORE viewing.

We suggest various video formats to use for authentic listening such as documentaries, interviews, news programs, commercials, situation comedies, dramatic series, soap operas, game shows, films, and concerts. Teachers can devise activities and exercises after a particular video has been selected. Commercials, by their very nature, are short, very visual, and often convey cultural information, with the latest idioms in use. Some imaginative, more entertaining commercials can be obtained by viewing the annual Clio Awards. Using Taylor's developmental

listening stages, one can adapt material to be used at different levels. The students have enjoyed viewing short segments from "I Love Lucy" and "The Cosby Show" and doing role-plays afterwards. A video assignment following the storyline of a situation comedy can be done on a weekly basis, with students writing a summary of the show viewed. A segment can be discussed in class and the tape can be put in the language laboratory for repeated viewing. The Exxon oil spill provided an ongoing story with news coverage continuing to the present day. Reading, writing, and listening skills can be integrated with some students reading articles on the topic while others listen to or watch the news, later sharing what they have learned in class.

With the information provided here, we hope that other teachers will be encouraged to try some of these strategies and thus bring the real world into their classrooms.

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This paper was submitted by Rima Katz and Martha Ralston from Rutgers University. It was originally presented as a demonstration at the San Francisco '90 TESOL Convention.

APPENDIX A

LISTENING NAME_____

INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT

I. WEATHER REPORT

Listen to a weather report and write down the information that you heard as well as you can. (Ex. Today it will be cold and rainy. The temperature is expected to be in the high 50's, but colder weather is on the way.)

Day_____ Time_____

Weather:

II. NEWS REPORT

Listen to a radio news report or watch a TV news report and write the general content of what you heard as well as you can. The news may be local, national or international.

Day_____ Time_____

News item:

If you had difficulty with this exercise, can you identify the reasons? Please circle as many as you feel apply.

a) poor listening comprehension
b) difficulty with vocabulary
c) speed of speech of the reporter
d) use of idiomatic expressions
e) use of slang
f) unfamiliar subject matter
g) other_____

APPENDIX B

CLASSROOM EXERCISES WITH AN ANSWERING MACHINE

Listen to the following messages and fill in the missing words.

(1) We are _____ at the moment. Please leave your name, __ _____ _____, and message after the _____. Thank you.

(unavailable, phone number, beep)

(2) We _____ come to the phone _____ _____. But if you leave your name, _____ ____ _____, phone number and message, we'll _____ _____ to you as soon as _____. Now, wait for the _____.

(can't, right now, time of call, get back, possible, beep)

(3) Hello, you've _____ the Immigration and Naturalization Service at Newark NJ. For _____ please _____ _____ now. If you would _____ to _____ information in English, please wait for the _____ and listen. Our information _____ is open from _____ ___ _____ daily. Callers wanting _____ about _____ _____ should say the following words: _____ __ _____ ___ _____ ___.

(reached, English, dial one, like, hear, tone, center, 8 to 4, information, F-1 visas, Yes I want to hear it.)

(4) Homework Assignment: Call my home number, listed on the course syllabus, during the evening of Feb. 22, listen to the message, and leave the information requested.